

# Ben Drew: Horticulturist, moderator

DREW-FROM PAGE 1

equipment to produce clean and pure apple cider.

For over a century, the Read farm had produced, apparently "on the side," an apple drink named champagne cider, of low alcohol content. With his new equipment, Mr. Drew, it is said, produced a superior quality of this cider for himself and his many friends. He did this by carefully selecting the variety of apples, which included Russets, Baldwins, Golden Delicious and others.

The Drews made the picture postcard farmhouse their home, which included five growing youngsters. The solid building was typically very early colonial. The materials for the most part were probably found on the land. It was constructed of stone, brick and native woods probably in 1746, with seven fireplaces in the central chimney, and a large Dutch oven. A wing was later added, probably for an enlarged farm family.

## Modern approaches

As time went on, Mr. Drew added new orchards here and there, in some cases ripping out century old apple trees to substitute modern, more popular and productive varieties.

As Mr. Drew grew older, he realized that he had a very complicated farm operation, and farming is a challenge to one's physical ability. With the increased fruit growing acreage, fairly well scattered throughout the town, there became the need for modern refrigerated storage. He built a controlled atmosphere plant, among the first of its type in Massachusetts to prolong life of the Drew Farm produce.

There came the time when Mr. Drew decided to dispose of his acreage and the temptation was there to sell to the highest bidders for house lots. His love for the open lands of his ancestors, and the conservation of open space in Westford, told him to sell his acreage to the Mormon Church which intended to continue the same farming process for the benefit of its members.

## Mormon Church buys land

The Mormon Church had hoped to continue the same operation of the larger farm for the

benefit of their stakes, or parishes, but this did not prove practical. They had depended upon volunteer workers from various stakes to cultivate, spray, prune and collect the fruit, but the use of inexperienced labor and management took its toll.

Failure of the program was obvious and the property this time was re-sold to the Anderson family. They continue to operate the farm as it was earlier, and also the fruit stand. The Keith Bohne family purchased the farm stand on Boston Road, along with adjacent acreage.

The centuries old 16-room farm house at 165 Main Street is now owned by the Timothy Moulton family.

About four years ago, Mr. Drew made a gift to the town of Westford of 20 acres of land in the Crown Road area. He also donated a less sizable parcel with a small pond.

## International role

It was during Mr. Drew's Westford farming days that he was selected by the U.S. Department of Agriculture as one of a group in an apple marketing delegation sent to several northern countries in Europe (Apples grow best in cool climates).

He reported at the time that they met with various officials in agriculture ministries in each country visited. He discussed methods of planting dwarf apple trees to obtain the most production from limited land areas, such as found in these countries.

In the later years of Mr. Drew's operation in Westford, he became interested in the work going on in Old Sturbridge Village's propagation of antique fruits. The apple was most important in Colonial America because it provided fresh fruit. It could be cooked, the juices pressed for cider and vinegar and could be stored in cool cellars. Dried apples were very useful, kept well and were a good source of income.

## Move to Vermont

The process of Mr. Drew's retirement took a number of years. While "playing around" with antique fruits, he also had the thoughts of moving to Vermont, where on less acreage he could continue his experiments with old varieties of

apples. He chose an abandoned farm in Vershire, Vermont, a hilly section in the upper valley of the Connecticut River. The elevation of 1700 feet was ideal for apple growing, high enough to avoid early frosts, the death knell of apple growing.

So in 1973 "Snowfields" became a reality. Vershire is a tiny town, its name derived by combining the adjoining states Vermont and New Hampshire. Coincidentally, it is not far from the village of Cavendish, settled by Westford folk after the Revolution with such family names as Proctor, Fletcher, Read, Dutton, Spalding, Roby and Hildreth. The villages of Duttonsville and Proctorville are nearby.

The orchard that Mr. Drew had been treating as an occasional "plaything" for almost ten years became a reality, only more so. The stoneless open fields that had first attracted Mr. Drew soon filled with trees — 30 acres of apple trees, producing some 20,000 bushels yearly.

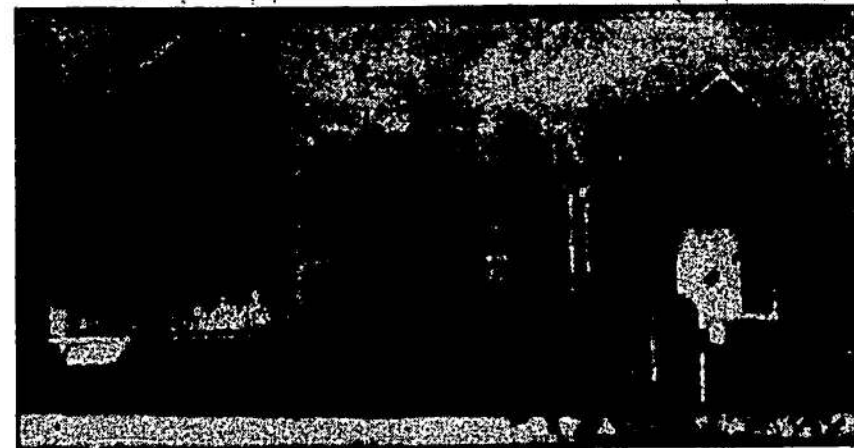
These were all modern varieties. But in one section of a field time seems to have stood still. That's where the antique varieties stretch along: Sops of Wine, Tollman Sweet, Maiden's Blush, Nodheads, Mothers, Sutton Beauties, Russets, Duchess, Perkins, and even a Fuji from Japan. There is a "no good" apple called Sheepnose...but it will keep over the winter.

Mr. Drew became a justice of the peace in Vershire and was a former selectman. He was also director emeritus of the horticultural Burnham Corporation of Lancaster, Pa.

## Survivors

Mr. Drew's immediate survivors include his wife, Sally, a brother William of Tubac, AZ, and five children: Ben Jr., of Williamstown, Sarah Drew Reeves of Norwich, Vt., Leslie Drew Sullivan of Hilton Head, N.C., Eleanor B. Drew of New York City and G. Westcott Drew of New Zealand. There are ten grandchildren. Two years ago on the occasion of the Drews' 50th wedding anniversary, the family assembled in Bermuda for the occasion.

Gordon Seavey is a native of Westford and a personal friend of many of the older members of the Drew families. He served on the Board of Trustees of Westford Academy with George Drew.



Photos courtesy Gordon B. Seavey

A farmhouse and barn on Boston Road that houses apartments and the DeWolfe Emerson real estate office (above) was built by Benjamin Drew's grandfather in 1865. The King's Grant J. Henry Read House, circa 1746, on Main Street (below) is now occupied by the Timothy Moulton family. It was the farmstead from which Ben and Sally Drew raised five children and an extensive apple orchard.

